

AMENDMENT

Please amend the application without prejudice, without admission, without surrender of subject matter, and without any intention of creating any estoppel as to equivalents, as follows.

In the Claims

- 1-8. (Cancelled)
9. (Currently amended) A process for the production of plants with improved growth characteristics, which comprises the following steps:
 - a) transferring and integrating a nucleic acid encoding a polypeptide ~~coding region~~ comprising a ~~prokaryotic~~ an *E. coli* ammonium-specific asparagine synthetase, type A, ~~coding region~~ linked to a chloroplast leader sequence for import of the asparagine synthetase into chloroplasts or plastids of a plant cell, wherein said nucleic acid is operatively linked to a regulatory sequence for expression in said plant cell;
 - b) transferring and integrating a nucleic acid for expression of an antisense chloroplastic glutamine synthetase RNA ~~or portion thereof~~ comprising transferring and integrating an anti-sense chloroplastic glutamine synthetase nucleic acid operatively linked to a regulatory sequence for expression of said anti-sense RNA ~~or portion thereof~~ in said cell to make a transformed cell; and
 - c) regenerating intact and fertile plants from the transformed cells, thereby producing plants with improved growth characteristics.
10. (Cancelled)
11. (Currently amended) A plant cell obtainable by the method of claim 9, comprising:
 - a) a nucleic acid encoding a polypeptide ~~coding region~~ comprising a ~~prokaryotic~~ an *E. coli* ammonium-specific asparagine synthetase, type A, ~~coding region~~ linked to a chloroplast leader sequence for import of the asparagine synthetase into chloroplasts or plastids of a plant cell, wherein said nucleic acid is operatively linked to a regulatory sequence for expression in said plant cell; and
 - b) a second nucleic acid for expression of an anti-sense RNA to an endogenous chloroplastic glutamine synthetase gene ~~or portion thereof~~ comprising a nucleic acid comprising an endogenous chloroplastic glutamine sythetase ~~or portion~~

thereof in an anti-sense orientation operatively linked to a regulatory sequence, said second nucleic acid providing reduced levels of endogenous chloroplastic glutamine synthetase activity upon expression of said anti-sense RNA in said cell.

12. (Currently amended) A plant, seed or propagule each containing a cell according to claim 11.
13. (Currently amended) A gene construct comprising:
 - (a) a nucleic acid encoding a polypeptide comprising ~~a prokaryotic~~ an *E. coli* ammonium specific asparagine synthetase, type A, linked at its N-terminus to a chloroplastic leader peptide sequence for import of the ~~prokaryotic~~ *E. coli* ammonium-specific asparagine synthetase, type A, into the chloroplasts or plastids of a plant cell, wherein said nucleic acid is operatively linked to a regulatory sequence for expression in said plant cell, and
 - (b) a second nucleic acid for expression of an anti-sense sequence that encodes an RNA molecule that is complementary to an endogenous chloroplastic glutamine sythetase gene ~~or portion thereof~~, operably linked to a regulatory sequence for expression of the anti-sense RNA in the plant cell.
14. (Currently amended) A gene construct according to claim 13, wherein the ~~prokaryotic~~ *E. coli* ammonium-specific asparagine synthetase, type A, polypeptide ~~coding region~~ is linked at its N-terminus to a modified transit peptide having an amino acid sequence MASMISSAVTTVSRASRGQSAAVASSAVTTVSRASRGQSAAVA.
15. (Previously presented) A vector comprising the gene construct according to claim 13.
16. (Previously presented) A plant cell transformed with the gene construct according to claim 13 or 14, or with the vector according to claim 15.